
How Can I Have Hope?

Living without hope is miserable. In fact, life, by definition, gives hope. Hopelessness takes what life we have and transforms that life into a zombie-like existence, more dead than alive.

So, is there any hope? Christ and those who followed him have taught that there is. This hope is not merely wishful thinking or denying the facts. This hope is an assured, guaranteed, absolute truth. But we can only have this hope by putting our faith in Christ.

How does this hope work?

1. A Christian's hope begins with believing that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That's a difficult teaching of Christianity for many people to accept. In fact, most Christians, if they are honest, struggle from time to time to believe it. Christians don't teach this because they find it easy to believe. They don't teach it because it gives them hope, although it does give them hope. But that's not why they teach it's true. Christians teach it because they believe it really is true. It doesn't matter if they struggle to believe it or not. Something that is true remains a fact, whether we accept it or we don't. And, Christians believe that what the Gospels tell us is an incontrovertible truth.

Not everyone agrees with this. So, in addition to personal doubts Christians must find ways to cope with the unbelief of their neighbors, friends, and family members. Christians must disagree in a way that shows the love of Christ. In the final analysis, though, each Christian must ask him or herself, "Do I believe Jesus rose from the dead?" If the Christian's faith is real, he or she will answer, "Yes." There will be difficult times of doubt, even in the genuine believer. But, if they must make a choice, Christians will always say, "Christ is risen, indeed."

This faith goes beyond merely agreeing that Jesus rose from the dead. Faith in Jesus Christ's resurrection becomes like a solid rock that forms a foundation for a Christian's life. If we leave out the resurrection of Jesus, then we have left the Christian faith. Yet, if we affirm it, we will know peace, joy, and contentment despite all the horrible things that life's circumstances create.

2. Before the resurrection took place, Christ died on the cross to take away the punishment for the sins of the world. He paid that price for us.

This world runs according to the principle of entropy, everything is running down and falling apart. In fact, deep in each of our hearts is a destructive way of behavior that will destroy every good thing, if given the opportunity. Each of us, if left to our own devices, will destroy every good thing, every person, and even ourselves. So, the problem of hopelessness runs much deeper than we may have thought at first. This problem is sin.

Jesus died to take away the punishment of sin, and in time, to remove all sin from the lives of every person who comes to him as Savior. So, Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the story. Just as you can't have Jesus's resurrection until he has died, you can't have hope without addressing the problem of sin.

There are two parts of how Jesus' death dealt with sin. First, he paid the price for our sin. God accepted Christ's death as the right way to pay the debt of our sin. Second, he began a process when he died on the cross that God is using to remove sin from our lives. The first part is complete. The second part is ongoing. The second part of the process will be completed when he returns to earth.

So, for the present time, sin continues to destroy every good thing in this world. As Christians we should not be surprised or alarmed at sin's destructiveness. We will definitely be hurt by it, over and over again. The Christian lives by the promise that even though we are being bruised and afflicted by the effects of sin in this world, God is actually using those terrible experiences to make us more like Jesus Christ. To become more like Jesus means that we will experience eternal life, we will be victorious, and we will share in Christ's inheritance. Most of this refers to things that will happen in the future. Some of it, though, refers to things we are beginning to experience now. We can know God's love. We can know that whatever happens to us God is using it for our good. God is not trying to hurt us. He is healing us from sin, and giving us newness of life. This not just added onto what we know already, it is something entirely different than what this world has to offer.

3. The kingdom of Heaven will come in its fullness, when Jesus returns, and everything will be exactly as it should be. That is the blessed hope of Christians. Again, Christians will struggle with believing confidently in this hope, but its truth doesn't depend on

their faith. It depends on what Jesus Christ did on the cross, his resurrection, and his return. It's going to happen whether we believe it or not. So, when Christians waver in their faith about the coming fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven, they should keep in mind that their faith doesn't determine what will happen. Jesus will make it happen.

In order to receive Christ's gift we must have faith. That is where faith comes in. However, Jesus said that even a small amount of faith is all we need (Matthew 17:20). It isn't so much the size of our faith, as it what is the object of our faith. Jesus should be the object of every Christian's faith. We put our faith in Him. It is also true, however, that if we have For many of us talking about heaven seems pretty abstract and hard to grasp. That's simply because some things about heaven are difficult to understand. For example, when you read about heaven in the book of Revelation, we learn, "The street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass" (Revelation 21:21). Where can you find gold that is transparent like glass? You can't find it in this world. So, it will be hard to picture transparent gold in your mind. How is it different than glass? The truth is we simply don't know. The point is that there are things about heaven that we don't understand now. So, if you find these things difficult to grasp, don't feel frustrated. No one on earth can understand them very well.

On the other hand, there are things about heaven than we can understand. We will become like Jesus without any sin in our hearts. There will be peace on earth, lambs and lions will lie together peacefully. There will be no tears and no suffering. Honestly, we may struggle to believe this is all true, but most of us won't have much difficulty picturing these things in our minds.

4. Probably the most important thing to understand is that our hope is based on believing in the heaven God is creating for us, not the one we want him create for us. Most of us have pretty crazy ideas about what a perfect world would be like. However, if you could really make those things a reality, the result would be very unheavenly.

This gets back to our sinful nature. Our idea of what is good is wrong. On the other hand, God's idea of what is good, is perfectly correct. So, the heaven we would create would be much more like hell. Only the heaven God is creating will be heavenly. Through Christ's death and resurrection, that heaven can be in your future, if you trust in him.

Rev. Jonathan Haslett

For the scriptural foundation of what has been written here, read Matthew 25, 1Corinthians 15, Romans 8:28, and Revelation 21

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you, the gospel which I preached unto you, which you also received, and wherein you stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures, and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.

After that He was seen of about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; But I labored more abundantly than they all: Yet, not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it were I or they, So we preach, and so ye believed.

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15.
